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ABSTRACT

This paper explains the government of the United Kingdom's (UK) National Literacy Strategy (NLS), established in 1997 by the incoming UK government to raise standards of literacy in English elementary school over a 5- to 10-year period. The paper summarizes how international research influenced the Strategy; reports on the impact of the NLS on the teaching of early reading in England; and indicates how international research findings may be used further to improve the teaching of writing. It also discusses a project at the University of Leeds (already running when the NLS was implemented) which investigated the teaching of early literacy and what teachers perceived as the most supportive influences in the teaching of early literacy. Contains a figure and 33 references. (NKA)

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Using International Research to Develop Literacy Teaching: A Trans-Atlantic Perspective

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The objectives of this paper are as follows:

- to explain the UK government's National Literacy Strategy;
- to summarise how international research influenced the Strategy;
- to report on the impact of the NLS on the teaching of early reading in England;
- to indicate how international research findings may be used further to improve the teaching of writing.

The author would like to thank Mr. John Willcocks for his assistance in preparing this paper and in conducting the research described in it.

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THE UK NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY

The National Literacy Strategy was established in 1997 by the incoming UK government to raise standards of literacy in English elementary schools over a five to ten year period. It has been made a central priority for the education service as a whole.

The main strands of the Strategy are as follows:

1. A national target that, by 2002, 80% of 11 year olds should reach the standard 'expected' for their age in English (National Curriculum Level 4). The proportion reaching this standard in 1996 was 57%.
2. A *Framework for Teaching* (DfEE, 1998a) which (i) sets out termly teaching objectives for the 5-11 age range based on the National Curriculum and (ii) provides a practical structure of time and class management for a daily Literacy Hour. The Strategy recommends that every elementary school should adopt the *Framework* unless it can demonstrate through its action plan, schemes of work and test performance that its own approach is at least as effective.
3. A program of professional development for all elementary teachers, centered on a *Literacy Training Pack* (DfEE, 1998b).
4. Other community-based elements of the Strategy includes a media campaign and a series of events in a National Year of Reading (1998-9), summer literacy schools and a range of recommendations for other agencies and institutions.

These strands have been subsequently supplemented by other initiatives, in the light of issues arising during the Strategy's implementation. These initiatives have included additional published materials to support the teaching of phonics and the teaching of writing and to assist pupils who need additional support in literacy learning.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS BY CENTRAL GOVERNMENT TO RAISE STANDARDS

The National Literacy Strategy is the latest in a series of British central government initiatives in this area of the school curriculum (Beard, in press). In the last decade successive British central governments have introduced several measures to raise standards. These measures have focused on

- the content of the curriculum,
- a program of national testing for 7 and 11 year olds,
- a program of regular school inspections
- and, eventually, recommendations on how to teach.

Only the last of these measures seems to have had a clear impact on national attainment, at least in the short term.

Despite the succession of reports and initiatives outlined above, there have been a number of research studies that convinced the central government that English literacy education was in need of substantial change. These studies influenced the nature and structure of the National Literacy Strategy. It may be helpful to see some as *predisposing* influences and one in particular as a *precipitating* influence. (Beard, 1999; 2000a).

PREDISPOSING INFLUENCES FROM THE UK:

1. National reading standards

According to the reviews of evidence undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), standards in literacy among British elementary school children have largely remained stable over the period between 1948 and 1996 (Brooks, 1998; see also Davies and Brember, 1997; 1998). Slight changes have often been followed by changes in the opposite direction a few years later.

2. Inspection evidence

Accumulating inspection evidence provided a key influence. This evidence suggests the following in the years immediately before the NLS was implemented:

- early reading in English elementary schools was largely taught by individualized methods in which the structure of commercial materials was often very influential. There was little use of regular direct class or group teaching of reading, even when the design of commercial materials suggested it (OFSTED, 1996c);
- the skills for dealing with information texts were taught rather patchily and sometimes left to chance (OFSTED, 1996a)..
- links between reading and writing were often not directly made (OFSTED, 1996b);
- the teaching of phonic knowledge was sometimes unconvincing and at times haphazard (HMI, 1991; OFSTED, 1996a; OFSTED, 1998).

PREDISPOSING INFLUENCES ON FROM OVERSEAS

1. International comparisons of reading standards

A key predisposing influence was the evidence on national reading standards in England. The need to target standards was given particular priority in the light of comparisons of reading attainment in different countries (Elley 1994; Brooks, Pugh and Schagen, 1996). The most recent research of this kind involved assessing the reading attainment of a nationally representative sample of 1,817 nine year olds in England and Wales. This research has indicated that Britain is generally out-performed by countries like Finland, France and the United States of America. In the middle and upper parts of the range of scores, children in England and Wales performed as well as those in countries much higher in the rank order (Brooks, Pugh and Schagen, 1996, p. 13). However, a distinctive feature of British performance is the existence of a long 'tail' of under-achievement which is greater than that of other countries (Brooks, Pugh and Schagen, 1996, p. 10).

2. School effectiveness research

One of the biggest challenges for school effectiveness researchers is to identify factors which 'travel well' and which can be strategically used to support school improvement (e.g. Mortimore et al., 1988; Reynolds and Cuttance, 1992; Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995; Teddlie and Reynolds, 1999). In a meta-analysis (research synthesis) of research from across the world, Jaap Scheerens (1992) provides a clear summary of these factors. Two characteristics of school effectiveness have 'multiple empirical research confirmation':

A. structured teaching

i.e. – making clear what has to be learnt
– dividing material into manageable units
– teaching in a well-considered sequence

- using material in which pupils make use of hunches and prompts
- regular testing for progress
- giving immediate feedback

B. effective learning time

This factor is partly related to the first, in that whole class teaching can often be superior to individualized teaching because in the latter the teacher has to divide attention in such a way that the net result per pupil is lower. Other aspects of effective teaching time are 'curricular emphasis', related to the time spent on certain subjects, and the need to inspire, challenge and praise so as to stimulate the motivation to learn and thus indirectly to increase net learning time.

A similar meta-analysis of research into the effective classroom by Creemers (1994) draws particular attention to the importance of classroom factors in school effectiveness. Put simply, the classroom learning level has perhaps two or three times the influence on pupil achievement than the school level does (Creemers, 1994; Reynolds, 1998; Teddlie and Reynolds, 1999).

As indicated above, there were tensions between the implications of these findings and practices in English elementary schools. In fact, in England there was relatively little direct teaching of reading *per se* (see also Beard, 2000b).

3. Specific Literacy Programs

Another predisposing influence was from specific literacy programs in the USA and Australia. These were of particular relevance in the light of the report, referred to above, that England (and Wales, according to Brooks et al., 1996) had a long tail of under-achievement, as there are several effective programs currently operating in different parts of the world which are specifically targeted at disadvantaged students.

The work of Bob Slavin and his colleagues in the USA is a case in point (Slavin, 1996). Their work at the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk in Baltimore has consistently supported several features of educational provision now adopted by the Strategy: Slavin's *Success for All* program is currently in use in nearly 500 schools in over 30 states in the USA. It is also used in an adapted form in Australia, Canada, Israel and Mexico. The main features of *Success for All* (more recently called 'Roots and Wings') are:

- a fast-paced, structured curriculum;
- direct, interactive teaching;
- systematic phonics in the context of interesting text;
- a combination of shared and paired reading and writing;
- early interventions for pupils who have not made expected progress after one year at school.

A similar strategy especially to address the needs of disadvantaged pupils is being implemented in Melbourne, Australia, in the Early Literacy Research Project (ELRP) led by Carmel Crévola and Peter Hill (1998). The elements of the program designed by Crévola and Hill have many similarities with Slavin's *Success for All* and the Strategy including:

- high expectations and explicit targets;

- detailed, systematic and on-going profiles of pupil progress;
- systematic direct teaching;
- dedicated times for specific literacy instruction;
- early intervention and one-to-one teaching for pupils who fail to make progress;
- careful co-ordination of each school's literacy teaching;
- a supporting program of professional development.

A PRECIPITATING INFLUENCE

A fore-runner of the NLS, the National Literacy Project, was set up in the Spring of 1996 in 15 English local Education Authorities. It included the following aims:

- to improve standards of literacy in line with national expectations;
- through a national network, to develop detailed, practical guidance on teaching methods and activities,
- to disseminate these to the project schools and to other, non-participating LEAs and institutions.

These aims were manifested in early versions of the literacy hour and a draft version of the *Framework for Teaching* (DfEE, 1998a) which translates the National Curriculum into termly teaching objectives for the 5-11 age range.

The National Literacy Project was evaluated by the National Foundation for Educational Research (Sainsbury et al., 1998). Data were collected from 250 schools on children's progress in reading between October 1996 and March 1998, using a variety of tests. The test results revealed a significant and substantial improvement over the 18 month period. Final test scores had improved by approximately six standardized score points for eight year old and ten year old pupils. This is equivalent to 8 to 12 months progress over and above what is expected in these ages. For six year old pupils the increase was even greater. All ethnic groups benefited equally.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS RESEARCH

At the time when the NLS was implemented, a project was already running at the University of Leeds to investigate the teaching of early literacy. The investigation concentrated on the teaching of some aspects of the National Curriculum, which has been revised in 1995 and which set out 'key skills' in far greater detail than its predecessor. The project also investigated what teachers perceived as the most supportive influences in the teaching of early literacy. These influences included initial training, school policies and schemes of work, publishers' handbooks, reading scheme guides, commercial magazines and newspapers, and in-service courses.

Methodology

- exploratory interviews with 12 teachers in two local education authorities (LEAs);
- repeat closed questionnaires mailed in 1997 and 2000 to teachers in a regional sample of schools
- repeat closed questionnaires mailed in 1998 and 2000 to teachers in a national sample of schools, which also included questions on the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy (literacy hour);
- longitudinal case studies of 10 teachers in five LEAs 1997-2000, using interviews, classroom observations and audio-recordings of teaching. This sub-sample was based on criteria related to their satisfaction with their main resources for teaching

reading and their apparent familiarity with technical terms used in the National Curriculum.

Results

Exploratory interviews indicated a number of issues that were subsequently investigated in closed questionnaires mailed to regional and national samples of schools. These issues particularly related to the following:

- *pedagogy*: patterns of teachers' reported teaching approaches;
- *resources*: the adequacy of reading schemes and programs;
- *learning contexts*: the demands of the National Curriculum and the literacy hour;
- *professional development*: sources of professional support for teachers in relation to classroom practice and professional knowledge.
- *subject knowledge*: teachers' familiarity with the technical terms in the revised National Curriculum;

Analysis of repeat questionnaire returns from the national sample revealed a number of ways in which the National Literacy Strategy is influencing teachers and schools. [For the investigation of changes over time, the data were treated as ordinal rather than interval, and no assumptions were made about normality of distribution. The statistical test used for this part of the analysis was the Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks test, and 2-tailed probability values are given.]

Statistically significant differences were found in relation to all the above:

PEDAGOGY

Teachers reported significant *decreases* in the use of

- direct teaching based on individual oral miscues (P=.02)
- paired (simultaneous) oral reading with individuals (P=.01)
- daily use of sound corners/tables and feely bags (P=.01)

Teachers reported significant *increases* in the use of

- class/group shared reading (P=.01)
- group guided reading (P=.01)
- group (round robin) reading (P=.02)

RESOURCES

On the first national survey, there were indications that many teachers felt that their schools might not have the resources to implement the NLS. After a period of substantial central government investment, the follow-up survey suggested that the situation was now more favorable.

- Compared with 1998, *significantly more* teachers now feel (late 2000) that they have the resources to deliver the Literacy Hour properly (P<.01)

LEARNING CONTEXTS

- Overall, a *highly significant number* of teachers felt that the Literacy Hour has changed the way they teach much more than the revisions to the National Curriculum did in 1995 (P<.01)

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- In developing their classroom practice, teachers reported significant *decreases* in the support from handbooks and teachers guides (P=.03)

- In developing their classroom practice, teachers reported significant *increases* in the support from in-service training courses (P=.01)

- In developing their professional knowledge, teachers reported significant *decreases* in the support from school documentation (P=.01)

SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

- A *significant number* of teachers reported that the type of teaching involved in the Literacy Hour is making big demands on their subject knowledge (P=.03

SUMMARY

The data suggest a period of considerable change in English elementary education, even of a 'major shake-up' in British literacy education: of substantial changes in pedagogy, in the use of teaching resources, in the learning contexts that teachers provide and in their recognition of the role of subject knowledge in supporting their teaching.

CASE STUDY DATA

Data from the case study teachers exemplify many of these changes. The data also indicate that teachers have been surprised at what children are capable of and of what is feasible in the teaching of early literacy. Note, for example the views of the following teacher, the most experienced of the ten, whose school was in a very disadvantaged area.

(April 1998) What is the point? ['of doing your own thing'] Because if we do our own thing, as we have written all these policies.... (and it has cost us - you have to fight among yourselves to get things agreed) And then comes the day, someone walks in [and suggests otherwise?!] Planning, daily planning, has changed since I have been here every year! It gets to the point where everyone thinks we are writing more and more and so you try another way – in fact you end up doing [yet] more and more. So why not go along [with central thinking]? We have just got to the point where you say 'Sod it! Tell us what to do and we will do it' and then we will adjust because we have so many [pupils with] special needs in this school...	(March, 2000) I think that it [the Literacy Hour] is wonderful. .....I am very, very, impressed. I wasn't looking forward to it, because, you know, as an experienced teacher, I know how to teach children to read. So then you are told 'your children have got to sit on the carpet for half an hour!' Well, I did not think that infants could do it. There is a lot of almost performance in the teacher's role if you are going to do it properly, which I don't find difficult, which I don't think I ever did find difficult, but at first, I sort of thought that was going to be hard, to keep their attention, to keep them on task. But in fact it is working beautifully and you haven't got children going off to their groups doing what the child sitting next to them is doing. You know, now, you can see which children are not watching. You can see when children grasp things. You can actually assess as you are talking. I don't like the idea of children physically sitting still, but I do like the fact that they are <u>all</u> learning and that they are <u>all</u> learning very much more quickly. The slow learners (the special needs children) are

	improving perhaps even more. I mean their vocabulary is so much wider.....The bright children, because you are talking all the time, at the higher level, are picking up [things all the time]. The middle children are learning to read through guided reading, because I am listening to everybody read, all the time[compared to when] you used to have one [child] here and one here. [two children reading alone on either side of the teachers desk]. You were hearing them read words, you were practicing key words, I suppose, but you weren't actually guiding their reading and I think that is wonderful.

THE EARLY SUCCESS OF THE NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY
The annual percentages of eleven year olds achieving at least the standard expected for their age in English (Level 4) are shown below.

Figure 1 here

Two qualifying comments need to be made about the results reported above.
1. The National Tests are externally set and externally marked. They also include separate teacher assessments by the pupils' own teachers; these have recorded slightly lower scores in the 1999 and 2000 (68% and 70% respectively, although still maintaining a rising trend of pupil performance since 1996).

2. The English National Tests scores are composites, made up of performance data in speaking and listening, reading and writing. The writing scores have consistently lagged behind the others. In 2000 the annual percentage of pupils achieving national expectations was only 55% (compared with 83% in reading), with boys performing much less well than girls. These results have helped trigger the development of additional published materials to support the teaching of writing, that were referred to at the beginning of this paper.

HOW INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH FINDINGS MAY NOW BE USED TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING OF WRITING.
Inspection evidence has suggested that writing attainment is relatively weak in many English primary [elementary] schools: 'Too many pupils are unable to produce sustained, accurate writing in a variety of forms. This has been a pervasive weakness in many primary schools, which should be addressed more urgently' (OFSTED, 1998, p.19).

The director of the National Literacy Strategy has confirmed that part of the reason for modest attainment in writing is that teaching has been disproportionately focused on setting tasks and then marking the outcomes. As a consequence, teaching has been channeled into correction after the event. Teaching has not been systematic and has not given support when it is most needed (Stannard, 2000). Again, overseas research

points up the likely value of teaching approaches that have not been widely used in England: shared and guided writing (see also Beard, 2000c).

1. Shared writing

The value of shared writing has been underlined by the research of Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987). On the basis of a sustained program of over a hundred experimental studies, they make a number of recommendations:

- pupils (and teachers) need to be made aware of the full extent of the composing process;
- the thinking that goes on in composition needs to be modeled by the teacher;
- pupils will benefit from reviewing their own writing strategies and knowledge;
- pupils need a supportive and congenial writing environment, but will also benefit from experiencing the struggles that are an integral part of developing writing skill;
- pupils may also benefit from using various 'facilitating' techniques to help them through the initial stages of acquiring more complex processes (e.g. listing words, points that may be made, the wording of final sentences etc.), in advance of tackling the full text. Such procedures can relieve the pressure on children to produce a text, even a rough first draft, until they have assembled the support that they need.

2. Guided writing

The value of guided writing has been indicated in a meta-analysis by Hillocks (1986; 1995). Hillocks reviewed nearly 500 studies that assessed the effectiveness of one or more teaching approaches. He then used a set of criteria to select sixty well-designed studies for inclusion in a meta-analysis. He identified four broad teaching approaches. Their particular features are set out in the table below.

Approach	**Teacher's Role**	**Writing Topics**	**Particular Teaching Strategies**
'Presentational'	Imparting knowledge prior to writing	Assigned by teacher	Setting tasks and marking outcomes
'Natural Process' and Individualized	Engaging pupils in writing and fostering positive dispositions	Chosen by pupils	Providing general procedures e.g. multiple drafts and peer comments
'Guided Writing' (what Hillocks calls an 'environmental' approach)	Inducing and supporting active learning of complex strategies that pupils are not capable of using on their own.	Negotiated	Developing materials and activities to engage pupils in task-specific processes

Hillocks reports that the guided writing approach was two or three times more effective than the natural process/individualized approaches and over four times more effective than the presentational approach. According to Hillocks, the presentational approach is only minimally effective because it involves telling pupils what is strong or weak in writing performance, but it does not provide opportunities for pupils to learn procedures for putting this knowledge to work. The process and individualized approaches are only moderately effective because they prompt ideas and plans for incorporation in particular pieces of writing, but do not ensure that pupils develop their own ideas and plans autonomously. This is especially so in the organization of different kinds of writing. The guided writing approach is more effective because it

presents new forms, models and criteria and facilitates their use in different writing tasks. Difficulties are tackled in a spirit of inquiry and problem-solving.

THE ON-GOING EVALUATION OF THE NATIONAL LITERACY STRATEGY

The National Literacy Strategy and the companion National Numeracy Strategy are being evaluated by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (Earl et al., 2000). The first annual report suggests that the significant gains in literacy (and numeracy) are likely to be related to instructional practices, increased motivation and more focused time on the specific curriculum area. Continued achievement will depend on teachers learning new skills - a slow and incremental process. The report suggests that the future efforts may be best channeled into capacity development for teachers and into increasing the collective capacity of schools and local education authorities.

CONCLUSION

Michael Fullan has described the NL/NNS as the most ambitious large-scale strategy of educational reform witnessed since the 1960s (Fullan, 2000). Its significance is enhanced by the fact that it is based on a detailed survey of international research. The Strategy has already led to major changes, thus indicating how useful such surveys can be, not only in the UK but also elsewhere in the international community. The dissemination of the Leeds research will now in turn place our own findings at the disposal of researchers and scholars alongside the other studies in the field.

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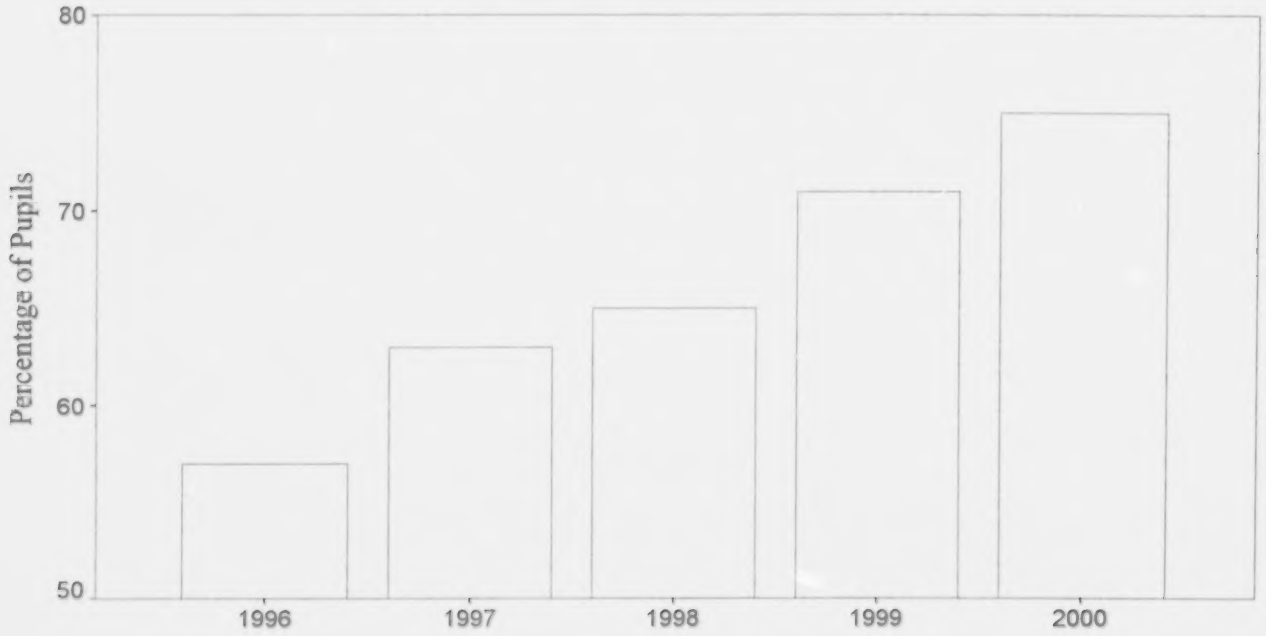

Figure 1. Percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above in the national curriculum English tests at age 11.